

**School Leadership Study
Developing Successful Principals**



**The Gendering of School Leadership:
"Reconstructing the Principalship"**

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About the School Leadership Study

Principals play a vital role in setting the direction for successful schools, but existing knowledge on the best ways to prepare and develop highly qualified principals is sparse. What are the essential elements of good leadership? How are successful leadership development programs designed? What program structures provide the best learning environments? What governing and financial policies are needed to sustain good programming? “School Leadership Study: Preparing Successful Principals” is a major research effort designed to answer these questions. Commissioned by The Wallace Foundation and undertaken by Stanford University in conjunction with The Finance Project, the study is examining eight highly-developed pre- and inservice program models to address key issues in developing strong leaders. Once effective processes have been identified they can be replicated, ensuring that more and more schools become vibrant learning communities under the direction of outstanding leaders.

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Abstract

This paper addresses the changing face of the principalship—the role of leadership preparation and development programs in preparing women for positions of school leadership and the resulting changes in the conception of the work of school leadership. This increasing focus on preparing women for positions of school leadership highlights two concomitant issues. First, it illustrates how some preparation programs have purposefully leveraged design and delivery features to prepare more women for leadership roles—equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary for systemic school change. Second, this trend suggests that the changing face of school leadership is accompanied—and potentially driven—by a reconceptualization of the principal’s role.

This study of eight exemplary school leadership preparation and development programs in five states found that the programs prepared higher proportions of women as principals than represented in a national comparison group of principals. These programs also produced principals with stronger prior instructional experience and with stronger reported instructional leadership and school improvement practices.

Introduction

This paper addresses the changing face of the principalship – the shifting conception of the work of school leadership with a greater emphasis on instruction, and the resulting increases in the pool of women being prepared for the principalship. The field’s increased focus on instructional leadership and the preparation of women highlights two concomitant issues. First it highlights how some preparation programs have purposefully leveraged design and delivery features to prepare school leaders with stronger foundations of instructional expertise – equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary for systemic school change. Second, this trend raises questions about how the changing nature of school leadership is resulting in more women entering the field of principal leadership. Drawing on a national study of innovative leadership preparation and development programs, this paper examines how these programs recruit and prepare a more diverse pool of leaders who take up their roles in different ways than principals prepared in more conventional programs.

Conceptual Framework

This paper is informed by several core bodies of literature – the changing role of school leadership, the landscape of principal preparation and development, and the gender stratification of occupations. Taken together, they suggest that the increased focus on instructional capacity in school leadership has disrupted the traditional gender axis of power, where men and roles associated with masculinity – such as administration – held higher status than women and the roles associated with femininity – such as instruction and childcare.

Changing Landscape of Leadership

The changing landscape of increased accountability has influenced a shift in models of leadership for which principals are being prepared. Within the context of an increased national and local focus on improving school performance and student achievement, there is greater emphasis on the role of the school principal as the primary lever for change (Lashway, 2003; Lucas & Valentine, 2002). The high performing schools characterized by strong instructional practices and the capacity to improve student learning require skilled school leaders who engage in sustained work with the teachers, and can improve the organizational climate, school conditions, and other contextual factors.

Given these expectations, the position of the principalship has shifted from a role dominated by a focus on management and administration to one focused on instruction and systemic capacity building (Grogan & Andrews, 2002; Hallinger, 1992). This development reflects the current expectations of principals to be change agents deeply involved with teachers in the improvement of instruction and curriculum. Such principals are able to demonstrate a strong and sustained attention to vision building that engages teachers and inspires them to support shared instructional goals (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000). As such, the work of the principalship requires a different skill and knowledge base than the field required previously.

Preparation for New Models of Leadership

Preparation programs for school leaders have mirrored this shift, adapting design and delivery features, including recruitment and selection, to give greater emphasis to instructional leadership. Preparation programs and districts are increasingly targeting

instructional expertise in their selection process, focusing on the active recruitment of skilled teachers. While these programs have resided traditionally at the university, this is just one of four general types of leadership preparation and development that also include: district-initiated programs, those run by third parties, and programs developed in partnership between multiple organizational stakeholders (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005). While there is a range of approaches to preparation of school leaders, increasingly programs are developing and employing design and delivery features expected to better prepare school leaders able to foster and sustain school improvement (Orr, 2006). These include the creation of collaborative partnerships with school districts, an emphasis on instructional and transformational leadership, rigorous recruitment and selection practices, and rigorous internship experiences that ground candidates in authentic problems of practice (Cordeiro & Sloan, 1996; Leithwood, Jantzi, Coffin, & Wilson, 1996; Orr, 2006; Prestine & LeGrand, 1991). The expectation is that the deliberate use of these program features and leadership development theories, such as instructional and transformational leadership, will yield program graduates whose leadership practice exemplifies these theories.

Part of this shift, particularly as demonstrated in the increased focus on recruitment and selection of candidates for the leadership preparation, reflects an increased intentionality about not just what to prepare candidates for, but also who to target for preparation and development. This reflects two distinct, but driving priorities within the field: 1) the identification of instructional capacity and intention to pursue the principalship as important entry criteria; and 2) the development of a cadre of school

leaders who are more representative of the diverse student communities their schools serve.

Gender Stratification of Occupations

These changes to the principalship represent a significant shift in the role conceptions of school leadership – not only in terms of the nature of the work, but also in terms of the gendered transformation of the role. The earlier models of principal leadership, which emphasized bureaucratic control, were traditionally masculine (Blount, 1999), with women holding the instructional roles associated with femininity. This growing focus on instruction – long regarded as a female-dominated field – has resulted in increasing numbers of women entering the arena of school site leadership. This feminization of the profession reflects larger societal forces, such as the increase of available opportunities with more attractive salaries for men in other fields (Strober & Lanford, 1986), reduced autonomy in the face of increased accountability (Tallerico & Blount, 2004), and the “deterioration of the job’s working conditions or rewards, with concomitant loss of attractiveness to males” (Tallerico & Blount, 2004, p. 636). As Reskin & Roos (1990) observe, labor queues, which represent the ranking of job opportunities from most to least desirable, are ordered primarily by gender, with men at the high end of the spectrum and women at the bottom of the hierarchical ranking.

The entrance of greater numbers of women to the principalship reflects an increased focus by districts on instructional leadership in the face of growing pressures of academic accountability post-No Child Left Behind. This shift in school leadership from administration to instruction and capacity building (Bottoms & O’Neill, 2001; Hallinger, 1992; Hallinger & Murphy, 1986) over the past decade reflects a parallel shift in power,

with women and images of femininity traditionally representing instruction now gaining a foothold in the masculine realm of administration and leadership. This feminization of school leadership is a challenge to the white male hegemony embodied in the administrative function. A recent study of the superintendency (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000) found that women superintendents were more likely to have more experience as classroom teachers – particularly at the elementary level – and fewer had coaching experience than their male counterparts.

Study Context

This paper reports on the dimensions of gender and leadership from the findings of the Stanford University School Leadership Study. This university-led national study examined eight exemplary school leadership preparation and development programs in five states, analyzing their distinctive context, design, and delivery features in relation to the leadership practices and school improvement efforts of their program participants.

The study was guided by three core questions:

- (1) Qualities of effective programs:** What are the components of programs that provide effective initial preparation and ongoing professional development for principals? What qualities and design principles are displayed in these exemplary programs?
- (2) Program Outcomes.** What are the outcomes of these programs? What are principals who have experienced this training able to do? Do graduates of exemplary programs demonstrate instructional and organizational leadership practices that are distinctive and that are associated with more effective schools?
- (3) Context of High-Quality Programs.** What role do state, district, and institutional policies play in the development of principal development programs? How do states currently manage and fund leadership development? What are the costs of exemplary preparation and professional development programs and how are they funded?

[Deb – I still need to add a small section here that describes the specific methods to this paper’s analysis, not just the broader SLS]

Sample

The study selected eight programs identified through a process of review of research, interviews with leading experts, and preliminary research on a larger sample of programs. The programs selected were identified as being effective in preparing aspiring school leaders or developing established leaders, and employing a variety of exemplary approaches to leadership development. The eight programs included those sponsored by universities, districts, and in partnership between university and district. The sample included five pre-service programs: The University of San Diego (CA), Bank Street College (NY), University of Connecticut (CT), Jefferson County, (KY), and Delta State University (MS). It also included four in-service programs: San Diego Unified School District, New York City Public Schools – Region 1, Hartford School District, and Jefferson County. All but one (Delta State) represent a continuum of principal preparation and leadership development, usually in the form of a university-district partnership. Two of these programs (San Diego and New York) were developed and managed in close coordination between the university and district, with a focus on preparing and supporting school leaders for the specific demands of leadership in those districts. Another program (University of Connecticut) produced school leaders, some of whom entered Hartford’s district schools, but did not otherwise have a formalized relationship. A fourth program (Jefferson County) included a wide array of both pre- and in-service programs, and the fifth (Delta State) provided pre-service that was not linked to district efforts.

The study used a national comparison sample pulled from the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) and the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), oversampling in the eight states under study in order to compare responses from program participants to principals within those states as well as nationwide.

Data Collection

The research team constructed in-depth case studies of each program, examining the defining design and delivery features of each program as well as their costs and funding models. These cases drew on both qualitative and quantitative data. The qualitative data included individual and focus group interviews, observations of program activities, and observations of graduate principals' leadership practice in schools. We selected 3-6 program graduate principals for in-depth study of principal practice in their schools. The quantitative data included surveys of 2000-2004 pre-service program graduates, in-service program participants, and a national comparison group of elementary and secondary principals¹. In addition, we administered surveys to teachers at the schools selected for further study.

Survey instrument. The principal survey instrument drew on a number of existing surveys, as well as newly developed items, to evaluate principals' perceptions of their principal preparation program and on-going professional development opportunities, views of the principalship, self-reported practices, and characteristics of their schools.

Among the instruments used were the federal Schools and Staffing survey and a survey

¹ We mailed out 721 principal survey to program completers (graduates of pre-service programs and principals in districts with in-service initiatives), and 1,229 to comparison principals drawn from the membership of NAESP and NASSP. Our overall response rate was 54.21%. Response rates among the eight programs ranged from 50% from Hartford Public School principals to 71% from Delta State University graduates.

developed and piloted by the UCEA/TEA-SIG Taskforce on Evaluating Leadership Preparation Programs based conceptual work by Orr (2003), national leadership standards (ISLCC and ELCC), Leithwood and Jantzi's (1999) leadership effectiveness research, and Leithwood and colleagues' (1996) research on leadership preparation program effectiveness. Additional survey measures of school improvement were drawn from research conducted by the Center on the Contexts of Teaching at Stanford University. Other items that met study priorities were drafted.

The draft survey instrument was piloted with principals in two stages, with survey refinement in between. Surveyed principals were interviewed about the survey's readability, length, comprehensiveness and redundancy. Based on the pilot survey results and conceptual priorities, the survey was further refined. WestEd conducted a final survey edit and formatted it for on-line and mail survey administration.

The survey included several categories of measures: 1) demographic and other characteristics of principals; 2) graduates' leadership practices; 3) school improvement strategies; 4) leadership preparation and development features and experiences; 5) graduates' perceptions of their learning and beliefs about leadership; 6) recent school improvement changes; and 7) moderating influences that included school or district characteristics. Of particular interest for this paper are the first two areas: principal characteristics and leadership practices.

Data Analysis

The survey data were analyzed using a statistical software package (SPSS) to generate descriptive (means, standard deviations, and percentage distributions) and comparative statistics. The survey measures were validated using factor analyses. The

coefficient alphas of the items within each scale were calculated to check measurement reliability. All scales had robust reliability coefficients (.828 and higher) and good factor loadings (.600 and higher, with most at .750 or above).

Research Findings

Preparing Instructional Leaders

The interviews and surveys of program officials and participants in the School Leadership Study (SLS) programs indicated a deliberate focus on two core criteria. The first of these dimensions is instructional expertise. Many of the SLS programs recruited and selected a different skill profile for leadership development than were reflected by the principals in the national comparison. The SLS programs focus on the development of instructional leadership, which they emphasize through their recruitment and selection standards as well as their design and delivery features. For example, both the Bank Street College Principals Institute in New York City and the Educational Leadership Development Academy in San Diego emphasized instructional experience and skill as an important criterion in their selection process. These programs attend to enlisting skilled educators with strong instructional backgrounds and leadership experience in academic/instructional rather than other areas.

This recruitment focus produced principals with experience in instructional areas that differed significantly from their more traditionally prepared counterparts in the comparison group. SLS principals were more likely to have had prior leadership roles in instructional areas and less likely to have served as physical education teachers or athletic coaches. Both groups had similar years of teaching experience (13.4 years for SLS graduates vs. 14.7 years for the comparison group), but the two groups varied in how they

spent these years. The SLS graduates were more likely to have served as literacy coaches and grade level or subject area leaders, and less likely to have served as coaches/physical education teachers. The differences across programs are more pronounced when analyzed by gender. As Table 1 summarizes, not only were SLS graduates more likely to hold instructional roles than those in the comparison group, but the women in both the SLS programs and comparison groups were also more likely than their male counterparts to have held these roles. Similarly, the women in both groups were less likely than their male peers to have held positions as athletic coaches/physical education teachers.

Table 1: Prior Instructional Experience (Before participating in program)

% of respondents with experience as:	Program	Gender	
		Male	Female
Literacy coach	SLS programs	15.6% n=32	28.4% n=88
	Comparison	4.6% n=307	14.2% n=260
Grade Level or Subject Leader	SLS programs	53.1% n=32	62.5% n=88
	Comparison	33.6% n=307	54.6% n=260
Athletic coach	SLS programs	40.6% N=32	5.7% N=88
	Comparison	58.6% n=307	15.4% n=260

Preparing Women for Leadership

In addition to recruiting and preparing a pool of leaders with stronger instructional backgrounds, the SLS programs also recruited pools of qualified and committed school leaders who are women or leaders of color. The principals prepared by these SLS programs reflect this emphasis. As summarized in Table 2, SLS principals were more likely than their comparison peers to be female (72% vs. 46.2%). SLS principals were also more likely to be from racial/ethnic groups historically underrepresented in school leadership positions. As shown in Table 3, 33.2% of SLS principals were Black, Asian,

Latino/a, or other racial/ethnic identities, compared to 8.7% of principals in the comparison group. These differences are more pronounced when examining the intersection of race and gender. SLS female principals were more likely to be White than from another racial/ethnic group, but by a significantly smaller proportion than the comparison principals. As Table 4 summarizes, 45.5% of SLS female principals were Black, Asian, or Latina, compared to only 12.7% of comparison principals.

Table 2: Characteristics of Respondents: Gender

	SLS Program Respondents	National Comparison
Male	28.0%	53.8%
	n=112	n=335
Female	72.0%	46.2%
	n=288	n=288

Significance $p < .001$

Table 3: Characteristics of Respondents: Race

	SLS Program Respondents	National Comparison
White	66.8%	91.3%
	n=256	n=556
Black	22.7%	5.3%
	n=87	N=33
Asian	2.3%	0.8%
	n=9	n=5
Latino/a	5.5%	1.0%
	n=21	n=6
Other (non-white)	2.6%	1.6%
	n=10	n=10

Significance $p < .001$ **Table 4: Characteristics of Respondents: Race & Gender**

	SLS Program Respondents		National Comparison	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
White	84.4%	54.5%	89.6%	87.3%
	n=27	n=48	n=275	n=227
Non-White	15.6%	45.5%	10.4%	12.7%
	n=5	n=40	n=32	n=33

Significance $p < .001$

Preparing Leaders for School Improvement

In addition to differences by program and gender in the demographic characteristics and prior instructional experiences, there were also differences in the nature of reported leadership practices and school improvement efforts. Table 5 reports on principals' (from both the SLS programs and comparison group) reports of their own leadership practices in terms of instructional leadership and school-level improvement. Across elementary (mean 3.14, s.d.=.46) and middle levels (mean 3.11, s.d.=.43), female principals reported higher levels of instructional leadership practice than did their male counterparts (elementary: mean 2.87, s.d.=.50; middle: mean 2.90, s.d.=.50). At the high school level there were no gender differences. Female principals also reported improved school-level practices at the elementary and middle school levels, in terms of teacher practice (collaboration, commitment, engagement, and quality instruction), student work

(effort and engagement), and organizational practice (distributed leadership, coherence, organizational learning, and organizational improvement). The female principals rated their schools' practice in these dimensions more highly than did their male principal counterparts.

In addition to these data, several measures, including learning outcomes from the preparation experience and prior instructional experience, were evaluated in a regression analysis to determine the mediating influences of gender and prior instructional experience on leadership practices. As shown in Table 6, even when prior instructional experiences are accounted for ($\beta=.170$), being female ($\beta=.128$) positively predicted how much principals demonstrated effective leadership practices. Above and beyond prior instructional experience, being female has significant independent effects on instructional leadership.

Table 5: Reports of Instructional Leadership Practice and School Improvement by School Level and Gender

School level	Gender		Principal Instructional leadership	School demonstration of improved practice								
				Teacher collaboration	Active, shared, distributed leadership	Coherent	Data driven, organizational learning	Teacher commitment	Student effort and engagement	Organizational improvement	Accessible, quality instruction	Improved teacher engagement
Elementary	Male	Mean	2.87	4.13	4.07	4.13	4.10	4.12	4.26	3.88	4.07	3.94
		N	110	114	114	114	114	114	114	113	114	113
		Std Dev.	.50	.63	.68	.63	.63	.53	.52	.47	.60	.52
	Female	Mean	3.14	4.30	4.29	4.33	4.23	4.33	4.39	4.08	4.19	4.09
		N	281	283	283	283	283	283	283	282	283	282
		Std Dev.	.46	.61	.60	.61	.65	.54	.56	.52	.68	.58
	Total	Mean	3.06	4.25	4.23	4.27	4.19	4.27	4.35	4.02	4.16	4.05
		N	391	397	397	397	397	397	397	395	397	395
		Std Dev.	.49	.62	.63	.62	.64	.55	.55	.52	.66	.57
Middle	Male	Mean	2.90	4.07	4.15	4.03	4.00	4.08	4.14	3.94	3.97	3.92
		N	78	79	79	79	79	79	79	79	79	79
		Std Dev.	.50	.72	.59	.70	.75	.67	.63	.39	.78	.51
	Female	Mean	3.11	4.20	4.26	4.30	4.25	4.27	4.24	4.06	4.10	4.05
		N	85	86	86	85	86	85	86	85	86	85
		Std Dev.	.43	.49	.51	.53	.66	.53	.55	.48	.62	.55
	Total	Mean	3.01	4.15	4.20	4.17	4.13	4.18	4.19	4.00	4.04	3.99
		N	163	165	165	164	165	164	165	164	165	164
		Std Dev.	.48	.61	.55	.63	.71	.61	.59	.44	.70	.53
Secondary	Male	Mean	2.88	4.00	4.10	4.08	4.08	4.09	4.13	3.94	3.95	3.93
		N	185	187	187	187	187	187	187	186	187	186
		Std Dev.	.46	.59	.61	.57	.58	.53	.56	.44	.61	.44
	Female	Mean	2.88	4.02	4.02	4.03	4.02	4.09	4.05	4.03	3.87	4.02
		N	82	82	81	82	81	82	82	82	82	82
		Std Dev.	.45	.66	.61	.73	.60	.58	.64	.44	.67	.46

	Total	Mean	2.88	4.00	4.08	4.07	4.07	4.09	4.10	3.97	3.93	3.96
		N	267	269	268	269	268	269	269	268	269	268
		Std Dev.	.46	.61	.61	.62	.59	.54	.59	.44	.63	.45
Total	Male	Mean	2.88	4.05	4.10	4.08	4.07	4.09	4.17	3.92	4.00	3.93
		N	373	380	380	380	380	380	380	378	380	378
		Std Dev.	.48	.63	.62	.62	.64	.56	.57	.44	.65	.48
	Female	Mean	3.09	4.24	4.23	4.27	4.20	4.27	4.30	4.07	4.11	4.07
		N	448	451	450	450	450	450	451	449	451	449
		Std Dev.	.46	.61	.59	.62	.64	.55	.59	.50	.67	.56
	Total	Mean	3.0	4.15	4.17	4.19	4.14	4.19	4.24	4.00	4.06	4.01
		N	821	831	830	830	830	830	831	827	831	827
		Std Dev.	.48	.62	.61	.63	.64	.56	.58	.48	.66	.53

5-point Likert-type scale (1=, 5=)

Table 6: Regression Analysis for Predicting Effective Leadership Practices

	Instructional Leadership			Sig.
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	
	B	Std. Error	Beta	
(Constant)	1.146	.228		.000
Female	.130	.038	.128	.001
Instructional leading experience	.085	.018	.170	.000
r-squared	.226			.000
Adjusted R-squared	.216	.449		

Discussion

This paper considers how the convergence of several dynamic forces in school leadership has changed not only the work of the principalship but also the gendered conceptions of that position. The shift within the field of leadership preparation to an emphasis on instructional leadership has altered the nature of the work and role demands on school leaders. This has had several core effects. The first is that programs have adapted their recruitment and selection strategies to privilege prior instructional experience. This, in turn, has altered the traditional gender split within education, which historically located women in instructional, classroom-based roles and men in administrative ones. By giving greater attention to instructional expertise, preparation programs have begun to draw more women into the realm of the principalship, previously the traditional domain of the masculine.

It follows then, that this paper would find that the more innovative preparation programs (reflected in the SLS sample) that tend to emphasize instructional leadership and the preparation of traditionally underrepresented leaders would recruit for these criteria and therefore yield higher proportions of women with strong instructional backgrounds. It is of note, however, that even when prior experience leading instruction

(e.g., literacy specialist, coach, etc.) are taken into account, that being female itself has a positive influence on instructional leadership and school improvement work. Most research on leadership and school-level improvement practices (see, for example, Leithwood 1996) does not look at gender as an independent factor. While the literature on the pathway from leadership preparation to practice to school outcomes examines the mediating factors, it has not inquired into the effects of gender. This is something that needs to be better understood. It is not clear whether or how being female might influence the practice of leadership and subsequent outcomes of school improvement efforts, but this clearly needs further exploration.

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Appendix A: Scale Items and Factor Loadings

Instructional leadership scale item statistics and factor loadings

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N	Factor loading
<i>Instructional leadership</i>				
q39a: Facilitate student learning (e.g. eliminate barriers to student learning; establish high expectations for students)	3.33	.736	668	.604
q39b: Guide the development and evaluation of curriculum and instruction	2.94	.762	668	.691
q39c: Build professional learning community among faculty and other staff	3.07	.844	668	.647
q39g: Foster teacher professional development for instructional knowledge and skills	2.72	.705	668	.728
q39h: Evaluate and provide instructional feedback to teachers	3.06	.702	668	.678
q39i: Use data to monitor school progress, identify problems and propose solutions	2.80	.744	668	.625
q39n: Work with teachers to change teaching methods where students are not succeeding	2.76	.735	668	.724
q39p: Work with faculty to develop goals for their practice & professional learning	2.59	.695	668	.700

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.